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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002606

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: VICE PRESIDENT ABDEL MEHDI PONDERES THE  
CONSTITUTION AND HOW TO GIVE SHIA WHAT THE KURDS NOW HAVE

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for 1.4 (B) AND  
(D).

1. (C) SUMMARY. During a June 18 farewell luncheon with Charge Jeffrey, Vice President Adil Abdel Mahdi noted that 13 of the 15 Sunni additional members to the Constitutional Committee had been decided upon. Abdel Mehdi opined that public ignorance among his Shia constituency about federalism could be a potential problem. Mehdi said the public must be educated about the constitution. He said there is some grumbling about the power and autonomy of Kurdistan, but suggested that other Iraqi provinces should form their own regions and achieve the same degree of authority and responsibilities that the Kurds now enjoy. Discussions are ongoing about uniting nine southern provinces into one region, he stated. Charge Jeffrey urged the Vice President to counsel the Shia to be flexible in accepting proposed Sunni Arab names for the constitution committee. He said it would be important to delineate at the authorities of the provincial and regional governments as distinct from the national government in the new constitution. He cautioned that setting up a large Shia regional government in advance of the approval of the constitution might complicate issues in Iraq. Mehdi speculated that the future Government would have a unicameral parliament elected from local constituencies that would in turn choose the prime minister while the presidency would be a ceremonial post mainly. END SUMMARY.

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LOOKING AHEAD: FEDERALISM DEBATE  
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2. (C) Vice President Adil Abdel Mehdi discussed the constitution during a June 18 farewell luncheon with Charge Jeffrey, saying the federalism discussion would be difficult because of a lack of understanding of this concept. Most of the debate is amongst the Shia Coalition, said Abdel Mehdi, not amongst the Kurds. While Iraqis accept the general principle of federalism, he predicted that the discussions about its implementation could be heated.

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GIVING SHIA WHAT THE KURDS ALREADY HAVE  
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3. (C) Abdel Mehdi mused that even if the Shia Coalition did not agree with the scope of local authority the Kurdish Regional Government has acquired, the Shia can do nothing about it. In the end, he concluded, the Kurds were only taking what should be theirs by right. He cautioned, however, that many in the Shia community do not agree; there is a sense that the Kurds have gone too far. Abdel Mehdi said that, in a recent meeting of leaders of the southern provinces, there was grumbling that the current situation is unsupportable -- that it is impossible to have one region with all the authority and other provinces with none at all. Abdel Mehdi stated that it would be impossible for the Kurds to have one set of authorities in their region and the Shia provinces to live with another. The Kurds' authorities could not be reduced. Thus, the authorities that the Shia locales have must be increased to match those of the Kurds. He also agreed it is important to delineate which assets and responsibilities belong to the provinces and which belong at the national level.

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SHIA MEGA-REGIONAL GOVERNMENT?  
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4. (C) Abdel Mehdi said there is a discussion underway about uniting the nine southern, Shia provinces to form a single region. The Sunnis might see the creation of a single southern region as a stepping-stone to the region's annexation by Iran, but Abdel Mehdi argued that such a larger regional entity within Iraq would have enough weight to create a strong national identity, prevent fragmentation, and

counter the current 'local' orientation that is so pervasive. He recognized the problem that the Sunnis would quickly try to form their own multi-province region, raising tensions in Ninewa (which they share mainly with the Kurds) and Diyala (shared by Sunnis, Shia and Kurds). The Sunnis could be sure only of Anbar and Salah ad Din provinces, and these are, Abdel Mehdi admitted, resource poor. (NOTE: In a later meeting, Vice President Ghazi al-Yawar told Charge Jeffrey that the unification of these nine southern provinces into a single region would be a catastrophe. However, he suggested that moving the Shia towards a grouping of nine provinces into three regional governments would be acceptable. END NOTE.)

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PUBLIC EDUCATION: URGENT  
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15. (C) Abdel Mehdi emphasized the need to educate the public, in language that it understands, about constitutional issues and expressed concern that there is inadequate time for public outreach -- especially if the Constitutional Committee takes several more weeks before beginning its work. He welcomed word of the resources available through USG funding to help with public outreach.

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BRINGING SUNNI ARABS INTO PROCESS  
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16. (C) Abdel Mehdi briefly discussed the 15 Sunnis to be included on the Constitutional Committee, noting that 13 of the 15 had been decided upon. He stressed that it would be important for the Sunni selection committee to avoid choices that would excessively anger the Shia public. "We have to be able to defend their choices with our own people," Abdel Mehdi cautioned. He acknowledged that the political views of those selected would likely be less important than their personal histories.

17. (C) Charge Jeffrey emphasized the need to focus on the constitution and use that framework for determining how to form a regional structure. He discouraged Abdel Mehdi from promoting the idea of establishing a single Shia regional government prior to the adoption of the constitution and national elections. He also cautioned that natural resources, especially oil revenues, likely would need to remain under the national government's authority lest they provoke struggles for territory. Charge Jeffrey also urged Abdel Mehdi to counsel flexibility among the Shia as they review the final list of Sunni Arabs proposed for the constitution committee.

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SHAPE OF FUTURE GOVERNMENT - SPECULATION  
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18. (C) Abdel Mehdi said he envisions the future government to be one that is parliamentary in nature and unicameral. It likely would be elected on the basis of provincial or local districts. The parliament should choose the prime minister, he opined. He agreed with our observation that such a system would give political parties more influence. He added that Iraq likely would have a ceremonial president whose authorities would be limited.

19. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK, minimize considered.

Satterfield